

Message Text

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ORIGIN SS-25

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NEA - AMB. LEWIS
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S/S -O: JETHYDEN

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
USCINCEUR
INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY AMMAN

S E C R E T STATE 148797

EXDIS,MIL ADDEE HANDLE AS SPECAT EXCLUSIVE,CINCEUR FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MILI, MOPS, LE, IS, SY

SUBJECT: SOUTH LEBANON SITUATION

1. WHILE AMBASSADOR PARKER HAS BEEN ABLE TO EMPLOY TO GOOD EFFECT THE DISCUSSIONS AMBASSADOR LEWIS HAD WITH WEIZMAN AND GAZIT ABOUT THE SOUTH LEBANON SITUATION, AND WHILE CERTAIN JOURNALISTS AND CERTAIN INDEPENDENT INTELLIGENCE INDICATE THAT THE SITUATION ON THE GROUND IS AT LEAST REASONABLY STABLE AT THE MOMENT, WE HAVE TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THAT THERE IS ANXIETY AND APPREHENSION WITHIN LEBANON AND ELSEWHERE IN THE ARAB WORLD THAT THERE MAY BE

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NEW AND ADDED TROUBLE BREWING IN THE AREA. SOME OF THIS APPREHENSION APPARENTLY HAS BEEN STIMULATED BY REPORTS OF EXPANDED ISRAELI PROBES AND PATROLS, ISRAELI ROAD BUILDING, ETC. LIKE BEIRUT, WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS HAVE THE CAPACITY AT THIS TIME TO MOUNT MAJOR RPT MAJOR OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS WITH THEIR OWN RESOURCES. ANY AGGRESSIVE ISRAELI ACTION ON THE BORDER

APPEARS UNLIKELY IN VIEW OF BEGIN'S NEED TO IMPRESS UPON PRESIDENT CARTER HIS PEACEFUL INTENTIONS PRIOR TO HIS FORTHCOMING VISIT TO WASHINGTON.

2. NEVERTHELESS, WE AGREE WE SHOULD RESUME CONSULTATIONS WITH ISRAEL AND SYRIA, AND CONTINUE EXCHANGES WITH KEY FIGURES IN LEBANON IN AND OUT OF GOVERNMENT, TO SEEK THEIR EVALUATIONS OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS, AND TO USE THE INFORMATION SO DEVELOPED TO PREVENT MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND TO KEEP MATTERS FROM GETTING OUT OF HAND AGAIN. IDEALLY, WE WOULD LIKE TO SECURE AN ISRAELI PROMISE THAT THEY WOULD USE THEIR INFLUENCE WITH THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS TO DISCOURAGE ANY DRAMATIC ADVENTURES.

3. MAIN PRESENT U.S. GOAL IS TO CONTAIN THE INHERENTLY UNSTABLE COMBINATION OF FORCES IN SOUTH LEBANON WITHIN TOLERABLE LIMITS UNTIL THE SARKIS GOVERNMENT CAN DEVISE THE MEANS, BOTH POLITICAL AND MILITARY, TO EXERT AUTHORITY OVER THIS AREA.

4. FOR AMBASSADOR LEWIS: PLEASE GET IN TOUCH WITH EVRON TO MAKE THE FOLLOWING KEY POINTS:

--WE CONTINUE TO BE WATCHFUL ABOUT THE SOUTH LEBANON SITUATION. AFTER LAST APRIL, MILITARY ACTIVITY IN THE SOUTH SETTLED DOWN FOR A PERIOD INTO A STAGE CHARACTERIZED
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GENERALLY BY ARTILLERY EXCHANGES BETWEEN CHRISTIAN AND PALESTINIAN MILITIAS.

--RECENTLY, HOWEVER, CONCERN HAS BEEN GROWING IN THE ARAB WORLD THAT DETERIORATION OF THE SITUATION IS POSSIBLE. THESE ANXIETIES, DESTABILIZING IN THEMSELVES, MAY HAVE BEEN ACCOMPANIED BY SOME INCREASE IN ARTILLERY EXCHANGES. WE WOULD APPRECIATE HAVING THE ISRAELI ASSESSMENT OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE AREA.

--OUR BASIC POSITION REMAINS TO SUPPORT SARKIS AND TO ENCOURAGE CONDITIONS WHEREBY FORCES SUBJECT TO HIS AUTHORITY CAN EVENTUALLY TAKE CONTROL THROUGHOUT SOUTHERN LEBANON. THE FORMATION AND DEPLOYMENT OF SUCH FORCES WILL REQUIRE TIME, BUT WE BELIEVE THAT A STRONG CENTRAL LEBANESE GOVERNMENT, EMBODIED IN THE LEGITIMATE REGIME OF SARKIS, WILL PROVIDE THE ONLY PRACTICABLE MEANS OF ENSURING THAT AN UNPARTITIONED LEBANON WILL REMAIN A NON-CONFRONTATION STATE. WE ASSUME THAT ISRAEL CONCURS THAT THIS WOULD BE IN ISRAEL'S SECURITY INTERESTS.

--WE WILL BE SEEKING SIMULTANEOUSLY THE VIEWS OF THE

SYRIAN GOVERNMENT ON THE SITUATION IN SOUTH LEBANON AND WILL URGE THAT DAMASCUS USE ITS INFLUENCE WITH THE PALESTINIAN MAINLINE GROUPS TO DISCOURAGE A MILITARY DETERIORATION THERE.

--WE URGE ISRAEL TO USE ITS INFLUENCE WITH THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS TO DISCOURAGE ANY RASH ADVENTURES OR MILITARY OFFENSIVES WHICH MIGHT ONCE AGAIN ENGAGE MAINLINE PALES-

TINIAN FORCES IN A CONFRONTATION WHICH THE CHRISTIAN FORCES COULD NOT WIN EXCEPT WITH OUTSIDE HELP. WE HAVE PREVIOUSLY CONVEYED TO THE LEBANESE ISRAELI ASSURANCES THAT ISRAEL HAS NO INTENTION OF SEIZING LEBANESE TERRITORY. WE PLAN TO SAY AGAIN TO THE LEBANESE THAT THIS REMAINS THE SECRET

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ISRAELI POSITION.

(FYI: ISRAELI OFFICIALS HAVE FREQUENTLY ENUNCIATED CERTAIN PRINCIPLES (E.G., MAINTENANCE OF THE "GOOD FENCE"; PROPRIETARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR WELFARE OF CHRISTIAN INHABITANTS OF SOUTHERN LEBANON, ETC.). YOU WILL REMEMBER THAT DURING AVINERI'S TALKS HERE IN LATE APRIL (STATE 097693); WE PUT THE ISRAELIS ON NOTICE THAT THE ABSENCE OF SPECIFIC COMMENT ON THESE ISRAELI POINTS SHOULD NOT BE INTERPRETED AS US ACCEPTANCE OF THE ISRAELI POSITIONS IN ALL RESPECTS. THIS SHOULD REMAIN YOUR POSITION IF EVRON REITERATES THAT ISRAELI POSITION. WITH AVINERI, WE SPECIFICALLY RAISED POSSIBILITY THAT "GOOD FENCE" COULD CAUSE PROBLEMS FOR SARKIS WHEN HE IS IN A POSITION TO REASSERT CENTRAL AUTHORITY IN SOUTH LEBANON. AVINERI NOTED IN AN EQUIVOCAL REPLY THAT ALLON'S "FOUR POINTS" WERE AIMED AT SYRIANS AND PALESTINIANS. END FYI.)

5. FOR CHARGE PELLETREAU: YOU SHOULD SEEK AN EARLY OCCASION TO MAKE THE FOLLOWING POINTS TO APPROPRIATE SYRIAN OFFICIAL:

-- WE HAVE BEEN GRATEFUL FOR SYRIA'S CONTINUING EFFORTS TO KEEP MATTERS FROM GETTING OUT OF HAND ONCE AGAIN IN SOUTH LEBANON. RECENTLY, HOWEVER, WE HAVE NOTICED IN LEBANON AND ELSEWHERE SOME APPREHENSION THAT THE SITUATION THERE MAY BE DETERIORATING AGAIN. WE WOULD GREATLY APPRECIATE THE SYRIAN ASSESSMENT OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SOUTH. WHAT ARE PALESTINIAN AND CHRISTIAN OBJECTIVES THERE?

-- WE BELIEVE IT WOULD BE DETRIMENTAL TO THE EFFORTS OF SARKIS TO PROMOTE THE RECOVERY OF UNIFIED LEBANON WERE THE SITUATION IN SOUTH LEBANON TO AGAIN REACH DANGEROUS SECRET

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PROPORTIONS. SUCH A DEVELOPMENT WOULD ALSO HAVE IMPLICATIONS FOR REGIONAL STABILITY. WE ARE AWARE OF THE MEASURED AND CONSTRUCTIVE SYRIAN POLICY OF SUPPORT FOR SARKIS AND OF THE SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCE OF SYRIA WITH ALL FACTIONS IN LEBANON. WE HOPE SYRIA, AS IT DID SO EFFECTIVELY IN APRIL, WILL CONTINUE USING ITS INFLUENCE TO KEEP THE SITUATION STABLE IN SOUTH LEBANON AND TO URGE RESTRAINT AND AN END TO LAWLESSNESS ON THE FACTIONS OPERATING THERE.

-- FOR OUR PART, WE ARE TALKING ALSO WITH THE ISRAELIS AND

THE SARKIS GOVERNMENT ABOUT THE SITUATION. WE URGE IN ALL CASES CAUTION AND RESTRAINT. JUST BEFORE THE NEW ISRAELI GOVERNMENT WAS FORMED, OUR AMBASSADOR IN TEL AVIV SOUGHT AND RECEIVED ASSURANCES FROM EZER WEIZMAN THAT ISRAEL HAD NO AGGRESSIVE INTENTIONS VIS-A-VIS SOUTH LEBANON.

6. FOR AMBASSADOR PARKER: YOU SHOULD KEEP BOUTROS OR SARKIS INFORMED ON WHAT WE ARE DOING. YOU ARE ALSO AUTHORIZED TO APPROACH THE MARONITE LEADERSHIP AGAIN TO URGE THAT THEY URGE RESTRAINT ON RIGHTIST FORCES IN THE SOUTH.
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